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## GEORGE SOURES

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BY ARISTIDES E. PHOUTRIDES  
University of Athens, Greece

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It would not be an exaggeration to say that with the passing away of George Soures, announced in a recent cablegram from Athens, Greece has lost her most popular literary figure. For more than a generation his satirical weekly under the title of "Romios," a derogatory term for "The Greek," has been one of the chief delights of the Athenians and of most Greeks everywhere. Its four pages of verse, composed entirely by Soures himself, were always read with interest by all classes of people who were eager to laugh with the satirist at everybody from the king to the peasant and at every country from Greece to America. For, in spite of his wide reputation as a poet, it is in the field of satire only that George Soures may be considered as a master.

He was born in 1853 in Syra, one of the islands of the Cyclades, the same group of islands which in ancient times gave birth to Archilochos and Seimonides, both famous as satirists and poets. He spent a short period as a "colonist" in pursuit of fortune in a Russian town on the Azof, an adventure which he has made the subject of one of his satires, with striking sincerity regarding his own weaknesses and limitations. But the city of Athens can justly claim Soures as its own. It was there that he spent most of his life. Dissociated from all political activity, he waged a war of satire against all political and social vices as he saw them in the world of the Greek capital. In private life he had to encounter many hardships which naturally tended to exacerbate his pessimism. His physique was poor and his appearance, according to his own words, that of a "four-footer with eyes full of fire and stupidity, a face wrinkled and pale like the face of a corpse, and a few teeth full of cracks." Constant bad health depressed his spirit, and those who saw him often asserted that he was silent and gloomy. For him princes and cobblers, men and women, sacred

things and profane, were equally ludicrous. He found everywhere shallowness, pretense, insincerity, impudence, and dishonesty. With a pessimism that knew no hope of reform he resigned himself to a satire without sting, and to a laughter without perceptible bitterness.

His decision to enter upon this career was reached after a vain attempt to pass the examinations for a doctorate in classical philology. In his own words, when by a unanimous vote of the examiners he won the high honor of failing, he decided to give up scholasticism and to become the servant of the Muses. This event he celebrated by an attack on the present-day methods of teaching the classics, a lesson which might prove of value in other countries as well as in Greece. The following is an extract from his satire:

Burn all the notes of Classen and his tribe!  
And come as sprightly as of old, my gaiety!  
Away with you, savage and sad schoolmasters,  
For whose sake all antiquity becomes disgusting!  
Away, stupid sayings of stupid lexicographers,  
Who only dig a grave for spirit and for body!

Men and gods of Homer,  
And this much neater town of Cecrops,  
The laughter of Silenus, the drinking songs of Satyrs,  
And the most graceful people of the world  
Are painted sour, and pale, and withered  
By this forsaken race of sophomores!

Come, my Muses, and you troubadours,  
Hand me my pen again,  
And let me never look on any old schoolmaster's face,  
And let my lips stop conjugating verbs!  
Keep me away from chairs of foolish sages,  
And give me laughter, life and my old company!

At the sight of the statue of Athena in front of the Modern Athenian Academy, a marble edifice built through the generosity of a wealthy patriot from Epirus, he satirizes the excessive pride of his countrymen and their unwillingness to make of their past a living force for the present. It is a spirit of irreverence which addresses the symbol of wisdom and industry:

Goddess of wisdom, Jupiter's great daughter,  
 And precious ornament for our Academy,  
 Oh, strike your shield with your long spear  
 And let the sun shine on your gold;  
 I see you and salute you, charming goddess,  
 Although you, too, like all the rest, are bankrupt.

How sorry I am for you, O Goddess; in this century  
 You seem to me—so help me God—like a schoolmistress;  
 And as I see you standing on that column high,  
 I wish I had a ladder  
 To climb your height and bring you down  
 And break your long spear on your back.  
 Why do you gape so like a fool, O gleaming-eyed,  
 Casting side-glances at Apollo who stands naked by you?  
 Though you still think you pass for a wise woman,  
 For us you are as nothing but an owl;  
 And though you owe your birth to a God's head,  
 You might be born even from me at present.

If not a voice is heard in the Academy  
 And nobody goes in to teach,  
 Don't you go thinking that we have an epidemic,  
 Or that wise men are lacking—never—God forbid!  
 We want you here in Athens only as an ornament,  
 Just as late Sinas built the place for ornament.

But if a crier went calling by the public fountain;  
 "What Greek would like to be an Academic?"  
 Then every Greek will fly before you  
 And there will be a bloody battle for all chairs—  
 And even I will run, Athena.

For there is everywhere a flood of wisdom and of knowledge  
 So we could give you some—at your request—  
 While you don't have to give us any.

In these lines we may detect the usual manner of Soures. At first sight his satire is not offensive to those whom he attacks. The Greek who reads the original is pleased by the clever style and laughs at the manner with which a sacred emblem is ridiculed, without realizing that the arrows are aimed against himself. He will good-naturedly remark: *καλά μάς τα λέγει* ("He gives it to us

good!') and smile complacently. The sting is not felt; and yet after a more careful consideration one becomes aware of the hopelessness of the satirist about any possible reform in spite of his apparent lack of bitterness or regret.

In a satire he calls "My Will" he forbids anyone to compose hymns in his honor, or shed tears. "I wish I could be buried in Westminster; but, since, of course, this will never happen, bury me, wherever you please, with glad faces, and without any cries of anguish or signs of mourning. Let no priest or deacon come near me and instead of sad hymns let my friends, all drunk with wine, sing love songs. Let no friend declaim any eulogy and if it comes into anybody's head to commit such a crime, let my friends beat him black and blue and may he lose his speech at once. . . ."

Only a few months before his death was Soures able to detract at all from his pessimism. His last words contained signs of a hopeful breeze. He felt pride for the share his country had in the great struggle for freedom and for the ideal of honor which induced the Greek people to dethrone a popular king in order to go to their allies' assistance and to redeem their plighted word. Death came to him in a day of confidence that the pending liberation of the Greeks of Thrace and Asia Minor was to remove the national nightmare of his people and Greece would at last be free to develop a new era of progress worthy of her traditions.